

## WOMEN AND GIRLS OF JAPAN.

In Japan the position of women is much higher than in other Asiatic countries. This is the more creditable to the people because Buddhism accords her a very low place, saying that her only hope of salvation is through being re-born as a man. In the history and literature of Japan women have gained great honour. Still it must be said that from a Western standpoint the Japanese woman is not to be envied. Her lot is summarised in "The three obediences while unmarried—obedience to her father; when married, obedience to her husband; when widowed, obedience to her son."

"The Great Learning for Women," a treatise composed by the celebrated Kaibara—gives the ideas that have prevailed in Japan.

A few extracts will show the general spirit. The only qualities that befit a woman are gentle obedience, chastity, mercy, and quietness.

It is the chief duty of a girl living in the parental home to practice filial piety towards her father and mother; but after marriage her chief duty is to honour her father-in-law and mother-in-law—to honour them beyond her own father and mother, to love and reverence them with all ardour, and to tend them with every practice of filial piety. A woman has no particular lord. She must look to her husband as her lord, and must serve him with all worship and reverence, not despising or thinking lightly of him.

The great life-long duty of women is obedience. There is, however, a change taking place in the status of women. The advance of education has altered the conditions of social life, and has also brought with it a rejection of the old beliefs and religions, so that the present-day woman is often one who scorns religion of every description as something only necessary for the weak and nervous.

Now let us very briefly run through the life of a Japanese woman. In the short space of ten minutes it is not possible

to touch upon the peculiarities to be noticed in the various classes, as for example the peasants, nobles, samurai, etc., but we can get a glimpse of what is mostly common to all.

The birth of a boy or girl is the cause of much rejoicing in a family. As boys alone can carry on the family name and inherit titles and estates, they are considered of more importance, but many a mother's heart is made glad by the addition of a daughter to the family circle. Babyhood for boys and girls is much the same—dress being often the only distinction. With boys the bright coloured clothes soon give way to those of sober grays and browns, while the girls retain the gorgeous colours.

As our little girl emerges from babyhood she finds the life opening out before her a bright and happy one, but hedged about closely by proprieties, and one in which from babyhood to old age she must expect to be always under the control of one of the stronger sex. Her position will be an honourable and respected one only as she learns in her youth the lesson of cheerful obedience, pleasing manners, and of personal cleanliness and neatness. Her duties must be always either within the house, or, if she belongs to the peasant class, on the farm. There is no career or vocation open to her; she must be dependent always upon either father, husband, or son, and her greatest happiness is to be gained, not by cultivation of the intellect, but by the early acquisition of the self-control which is expected of all Japanese women to an even greater degree than of the men.

This self-control must consist, not simply in the concealment of all the outward signs of any disagreeable emotion—whether of grief, anger, or pain, but in the assumption of a cheerful smile and agreeable manners under even the most distressing circumstances.

The effect of this teaching is seen in the attractive but dignified manners of the Japanese women, and even of the very little girls. Our little girl's place in the family then is a pleasant one. She is the pet and plaything of father and brothers, and she is never saluted by anyone except her parents without the title of respect due to her position.

As she passes from babyhood to girlhood, and from girlhood to womanhood, she is the object of much love and care and solicitude, but she does not grow up irresponsible or



untrained to meet the duties which womanhood will surely bring to her.

She must learn all the duties that fall upon the wife and mother of a Japanese household as well as obtain the instruction in books and mathematics that is coming to be more and more a necessity for the women of Japan. She must take a certain responsibility in the household, must see that tea is made for the guests that may be received by her parents, and in all but the families of highest rank, must serve it herself. Housework, washing, cooking, are all parts of the girl's education, as well as reading, writing, music, the art of arranging flowers, and flower painting.

But the Japan of old is not the Japan of to-day, and in the School system now prevalent throughout the Empire boys and girls are equally provided for. Every rank in life, every grade in learning, may find its proper place in the new school system, and the girls eagerly grasp their opportunities and show themselves apt and willing students of the new learning offered to them.

Upon the young girls the influence of the school is to make them more independent, self-reliant, and stronger women. At school the more progressive feeling of the times predominates among the authorities, and the children are encouraged to unbend and enjoy themselves in games and frolics as true children should do. But the young girl who has finished this pleasant school life with all its advantages is not as well fitted as under the old system for the duties and trials of married life, unless under exceptional circumstances where the husband chosen has advanced ideas. To those teaching the young girls of Japan to-day, the problem of how to educate them aright is a deep one.

Japanese children are not without their special amusements. Their two chief Festivals are that of the New Year and The Feast of Dolls. They also play games and enjoy fairy tales as much as English children.

Among the surroundings with these duties and amusements our little girl grows to womanhood. Under this discipline she is a finished product at the age of 16-18. She is pure, sweet and amiable with great power of self-control, and a knowledge of what to do upon all occasions, but the higher part of her nature is little developed, and no great

religious truths have lifted her soul above the world into a clearer and higher atmosphere. With the close of her childhood the happiest period in the life of a Japanese woman closes. Her sphere now seems to grow narrower, difficulties one by one increase, and the young girl who sees life before her as something broad and expansive, and who looks to the future with expectant joy, becomes in a few years the weary disheartened woman.

When the Japanese maiden arrives at the age of 16, she is expected to marry as a matter of course. She is usually allowed her choice in regard to whether she will or will not marry a certain man, but she is expected to marry someone, and not to take too much time in making up her mind. The alternative of perpetual spinsterhood is never considered either by herself or by her parents.

The young wife, when she enters her husband's home, is not, as in our country, entering upon a new life as mistress of a house, with absolute control over all her little domain. Should her husband's parents be living she becomes almost as their servant, and even her husband is unable to defend her from the exactions of her mother-in-law, should this new relative be inclined to make full use of the power given her by custom.

Happy is the girl whose husband has no parents living, her comfort in life is materially increased by her husband's loss, for, instead of having to serve two masters, she will then have to serve only one, and that one more kind and thoughtful of her strength and comfort.

In Japan the idea of a wife's duty to her husband includes no thought of companionship on terms of equality.

She is simply the housekeeper, the head of the establishment, to be honoured by the servants because she is the one nearest to the master. Her position is one of much care and responsibility, but she is not the intimate friend of her husband. She appears rarely with him in public, is expected always to wait upon him and serve his steps, and must bear all things from him with smiling face and agreeable manners. But though the present position of a Japanese woman is that of a dependent, the dependence is in many cases a happy one. The wife's position, especially if she be the mother of children, is often pleasant, and her chief joy and pride lie in the proper conduct of her house and the training of the children.



Certainly a Japanese man is lucky in having all the little things in his life attended to by his thoughtful wife—a good careful body-servant always at hand to bear for him the trifling worries and cares. It is no wonder that there are no bachelors in Japan.

The Japanese mother's life is one of perfect devotion to her children. Her days are spent in caring for them, her evenings in watching over them. She spares neither time nor trouble in doing anything for their comfort and pleasure. In sickness, in health, day and night, the little ones are her one thought, and from the house of the noble, to the humble cot of the peasant, this tender mother-love may be seen in all its different phases.

Nothing in all one's study of Japanese life seems more beautiful and admirable than the influence of the mother over her children—an influence that is gentle and all pervading, bringing out all that is sweetest and noblest in the feminine character, and affording the one almost unlimited opportunity of a Japanese woman's life.

We must now hurry on to the end of her life. No Japanese woman is ashamed to show that she is getting on in years. The reason for this lies, at least in part, in the fact that every woman looks forward to the period of old age as the time when she will attain freedom from her life-long service to those about her.

May I end with the closing scenes of one of Japan's heroic women. I will give the account in the words of one who knew her:—

"A picture comes to me of one whose memory is an inspiring thought to the many who have the honour to call her 'mother.'

"A stately old lady, left a widow many years ago, before recent changes had wrought havoc preparatory to further progress, she seemed always the model of a mother of the old school. Herself a woman of thorough classical education, her example and teaching were to both sons and daughters a constant inspiration, and in her old age she found herself the honoured head of a family well-known in the arts of war and peace, a goodly company of sons and daughters, everyone of them heirs of her spirit and intellect.

"Though conservative herself and always clinging to the

old customs, she put no block in the path of her children's progress, and her fine character, heroic spirit and staunch loyalty to what she believed, were worth more to her children than anything else could have been. Tried by war, by siege, by banishment, by danger and sufferings of all kinds, to her was given at last an old age of prosperity among children of whom she might well be proud.

"Keeping her physical vigour to the end, and dying at last after an illness of only two days, her spirit passed out into the great unknown, ready to meet its dangers as bravely as she had met those of earth, or to enjoy its rest as sweetly and appreciatively as she had enjoyed that of her old age in the home of her eldest son.

"Two weeks later, amid such rain as Japanese skies know all too well how to let fall, I attended her funeral at the cemetery.

"The Cemetery Chapel was crowded, but a place was reserved for me just behind the long line of white-robed mourners.

"In the Buddhist faith she had lived, and by the Buddhist ceremonial she was buried. The chanted ritual, the gorgeously-robed priests, and the heavy smell of incense in the air reminding one of a Roman Catholic Ceremony. The white wooden coffin was placed upon a bier at the entrance to the Chapel, and when the priests had done their work and the ecclesiastical ceremony was over, the relatives arose, one by one, walked over to the coffin, bowed low before it, and placed a grain of incense upon the little censer that stood on a table before the bier, then bowing again retired to their places. Slowly and solemnly, from the tall soldier son, his hair already streaked with grey, to the two-year-old grandchild, all paid this last token of respect to a noble spirit, and after the relatives, the guests performed the same ceremony. What the meaning of the rite was I did not know, but to me as I performed the act, it only signified the honour in which I held the memory of an heroic woman who had done her part in the world according to the light that God had given her."

M. W. K.